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ABSTRACT

The Foundation for Excellent Schools (FES) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of American public education through programs designed to increase opportunities and improve the academic performance of all students by bringing together educators, students, parents, and the local business community. Since 1987, the FES and its predecessor organizations (notably the National College Counseling Project) have worked with 110 schools to create low-budget, grassroots, self-sustaining programs. This report from the FES national conference in 1997 highlights key presentations and summarizes key topics grouped into the following areas: (1) "Creating an Educational Community"; (2) "Parents as Partners"; (3) "Winning the Literacy Challenge"; (4) "The Power of Partnering with Colleges"; and (5) "An FES Priority: Transforming High-Risk into High-Promise." Other featured topics included fundraising tips, leadership development, and ways to make the transition from school to work. Each section presents some examples of FES school programs and the ways participants exchanged ideas and found ways to adapt innovations from one school to another. The report concludes with excerpts from the keynote address by Albert R. Dowden, of Volvo Group North America, Inc., who asked educators to face the challenges of educating young people for the critical thinking they will need in the work world. (SLD)

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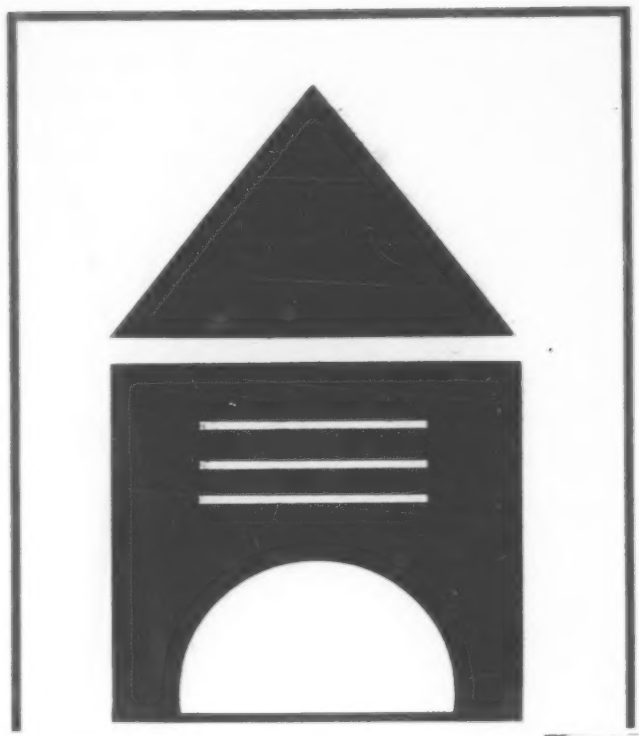
ED 416 257

Challenge to Excellence
National Conference Report



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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Foundation for Excellent Schools

November 14–15, 1997
Newport, Rhode Island

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"We are the dream makers and FES helps us make the dream come true,"

Rick Dalton

said Ira Weston, principal of Brooklyn's Paul Robeson High School. Speaking at the final session of the FES National Conference, Weston was one of 200 people who had battled snow, rain, and sleet to come to Newport, Rhode Island.

He was joined by: parents, teachers, superintendents, foundation heads, and community, and business leaders, representing Anglo, Latino, African, Asian, and Native American communities and schools. From the shores of the Pacific and the Florida Panhandle, the Navajo Nation in Arizona and the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, the Appalachians of Kentucky and the streets of Bedford Stuyvesant, the participants at the FES National Conference came together. We were united by our passion to swap ideas and approaches that create opportunities for our students and move our schools to excellence. We were strengthened by our diversity and by our differences.

We embodied one of the FES core beliefs—it takes a team. At every workshop, panel, and informal discussion, we shared our ideas and thoughts, practices, and challenges. We learned from each other.

The FES conference helped to foster and nurture connection and collaboration. Pam Vander Kley, principal of Reedsport High School in Oregon, spoke for many of us when she said, "I left the conference knowing I have a network of professional colleagues out there whom I can turn to."

The conference reaffirmed the fundamental need for partnership. Schools need to collaborate with businesses, colleges, parents, communities, and social service agencies.

Perhaps most important, we need to partner with one another: schools need to help schools. The valuable linkages between A. Philip Randolph High and its Harlem neighbor, Roberto Clemente Junior High—that include student mentoring and professional development initiatives—were a reminder that only by working together can we meet the challenge to excellence and reshape American education.

Most important for me was realizing that the expertise and commitment to meet the challenge to excellence is already well established in our schools and communities. We need exposure to successful practices, help with the change process, and a support network to tap this valuable resource.

FES belongs to all of us: it is a dream maker; we can help schools and communities meet the challenge. In turn, FES must challenge all of us. It is up to us to create more ideas, more opportunities, and the support needed to make the dreams come true.

Rick Dalton

Rick Dalton, *President*

Challenge to Excellence

National Conference Report

Foundation for Excellent Schools

November 14–15, 1997
Newport, Rhode Island

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Foreword

Not often are we affirmed and supported for the jobs we do. Everyone had a chance to shine here. That's important because when you go back to work on Monday, that glow will be there and students will feel it. That is what this conference accomplished.

–Noreen Hosier, Principal
David Ruggles Junior High School 258, Brooklyn, New York

Individual talents, strengths, and ideas shared. Exchanged. Explored. Applied. That's what makes networking such a powerful tool, and rarely has it worked so well as in the FES national conference in Newport, Rhode Island.

The following is a report from that conference. It highlights key presentations and summarizes key topics:

- Creating an Educational Community
- Parents as Partners
- Winning the Literacy Challenge
- The Power of Partnering with Colleges
- An FES Priority: Transforming High-Risk into High-Promise

Other featured topics include fundraising tips, leadership development, and ways to make the transition from school to work.

Participants eagerly exchanged ideas and found ways to adapt innovations from one school to another. Many collaborations were well underway before the conference officially convened: FES schools prepared with advanced training workshops, telephone conversations, and Internet connections.

Ideas generated by FES schools have a way of taking on a life of their own. A scholarship program started in Pickens County, Georgia, was adopted by the Reedsport School District in Oregon. A literacy strategy in Macon, Georgia, is now being used by two New York City schools.

Sparked by this milestone conference, educators took home valuable initiatives–all with the goal of increasing opportunities for students, strengthening relationships between educators and the community, and improving academic performance.

Read through the following summary and share in our success.

Marvin Harrison of Oxbow High School in Bradford, Vermont, shares ideas during the carousel

Creating an Educational Community

Harlem and Vermont are worlds apart. Concrete sidewalks, brick apartment buildings, and crowded subways define one world. Dense forests, clapboard houses, and snow-capped mountains characterize the other. Despite the vast differences, schools in both places are working toward the same goal—creating an educational community that fosters student achievement.

Examples of schools creating educational communities were highlighted at several panel discussions, including *It Takes a Village* and *Schools Helping Schools*.

In Harlem, FES brought together A. Philip Randolph Campus High School and Roberto Clemente Junior High School 195. The schools first developed a mentoring program. "Then, we started branching out, working with other schools and other community agencies just to make it better," said Irene Gee, assistant principal at Randolph. The partnership has expanded to include seven separate sites, including two elementary schools and City College of New York.

A tutoring program started. Working together, the partners cleaned up a local park that is now used as a classroom resource. Students are invited to programs at partnering schools, like career days. PTA presidents are coordinating fund-raisers.

"We're breaking down walls," said Gee. "By pooling our resources together we have a stronger community."

Several hundred miles away, in two Vermont towns, educational communities are being formed.

In Bradford, Oxbow High School is creating partnerships with students, staff, parents, alumni, community members, and businesses.

Working with the business community, Oxbow established a community scholarship program to encourage more students to pursue postsecondary schooling. All high school students can earn points for academic "excellence" and community service and receive a scholarship at graduation based on these points. The program, funded by annual donations from teachers, parents, businesses, and the community, represents a true community-school partnership, said Marvin Harrison, a parent, businessman, and Oxbow Steering Committee member.

Frequent communication with school constituencies is vital. Strategies include a monthly letter from the principal to all parents, radio show discussions, newspaper articles, a newsletter from the school's journalism class, a report card-open house night for the community, and parent conferences. Oxbow also tries to entice the community into the school in nontraditional ways. At a

Cracker barrel session

We're breaking down walls. By pooling our resources together we have a stronger community.

—Irene Gee
Assistant Principal
A. Philip Randolph Campus
High School
New York, New York

Excellence is like infinity. There is no ceiling.

–Cecil R. Forster, Jr., Chairman of the Board, FES

World War II Day, Oxbow invited community members to classes to discuss their experiences.

Hazen Union School, in Hardwick, Vermont, is also building community support. Hazen held a Community Dialogue Day when students, parents, community members, and business people discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the school and ways to improve it. Students played a key role as facilitators in developing action plans. At the same time, teachers and staff met separately to brainstorm and to develop school improvement plans.

Toll Gate High School of Warwick, Rhode Island, and Paul Robeson High School of Brooklyn, New York, share successful practices during the carousel.

I've learned that there are some things that are very similar in different school systems. I'd like to have some of my students get to meet some of your students. I have gotten goose bumps learning about other schools, and I'd like to share that with my students.

–Karen Best, Teacher
David Ruggles Junior High School 258,
Brooklyn, New York

Parents as Partners

Boosting parental involvement is a goal of FES schools nationwide. Successful practices of FES schools in diverse settings were shared in the panel discussion, *Involvement for Improvement: How to Get Parents On Board*.

Administrators at Tiogue Elementary School in Rhode Island discovered that one key to parental involvement is plenty of notice and frequent reminders. The Tiogue parents group explains the year's activities and circulates a sign-up sheet at the fall Open House. Sign-up sheets are also sent home and reminders are sent home closer to the activity.

Tiogue publishes a handbook for volunteers, explaining their responsibilities in in-school and community service projects. Teachers maintain a chart in their classroom that records parent participation in school activities. Last year, 98 percent of Tiogue parents participated in at least one school event.

"If you want parents to be involved, you have to make parents feel that you really want them," says Sue Conde, a Tiogue parent.

Communication also plays a large part in increasing parental involvement at Port St. Joe Elementary School in Florida. Callers to the school hear a four-minute recorded news brief of school activities when they are put on hold.

To encourage their children to attend postsecondary schools, the school district and community created a program that allows students to earn points for attendance, grades, and taking college entrance exams. The points are applied toward college and technical school scholarships. Parents earn points for their children by attending educational workshops.

Ballard Hudson Middle School in Macon, Georgia, realized that too often the only communication received by parents about their children contains bad news. The school started sending home pink notes with praises.

To increase participation at parent conferences and PTA meetings, the school posted flyers and sent buses into the projects to pick up adults. Students also provide baby-sitting at PTA meetings. To encourage parents to attend PTA meetings, each meeting features a student performance. The school posted a 300 percent increase in parental involvement during its three years with FES.

"The key is to make parents feel welcome, because the majority of our parents have not had positive experiences in school and they feel threatened and unsure when they are here," said Tracie Dye, a teacher at Ballard Hudson.

Many parents on the Navajo Indian Reservation in Arizona had negative educational experiences as children, forced to attend Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools where they were not allowed to speak their native language.

Conference participants offer thoughts on parental involvement.

If you want parents to be involved, you have to make parents feel that you really want them.

—Sue Conde, Parent
Tiogue Elementary School
Coventry, Rhode Island

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Many Navajos believe that teachers are professionals and parents should not get involved unless asked, said Ganado Principal Susan Stropko.

To counter these attitudes, teams of Ganado teachers traveled to the political chapters in the district—an area the size of Rhode Island—for informal discussions with parents on Sunday afternoons.

The school also sponsored Career Days, which brought parents and community members into the school. Students visited businesses and colleges and postsecondary institutions outside the nation.

These programs dramatically increased parental participation in school activities from 20 percent to 100 percent in the past year, Stropko said.

We have to think about what kind of students we want to produce, what we want them to know and be able to do, and work backwards from there.

—Ira Weston, Principal
Paul Robeson High School
Brooklyn, New York

Conference participants exchange ideas about partnering with parents.

Maurice Horton and Merrily Wilbur

Winning the Literacy Challenge

Many FES schools are facing the literacy challenge head-on with innovative strategies. Educators shared their ideas and successes at the panel discussion *Successful Strategies to Increase Literacy* and the workshop *Techniques to Improve Literacy*.

Joyce Picard, a teacher at Citizens' Memorial Elementary School in Rhode Island, described a school-wide emphasis that reaches out to involve families. "Everything we do in our building is based on improving literacy," she said. Every child, for example, is given a magazine to take home and share with their family.

Also in Rhode Island, teachers at the Social Street/ Pothier Elementary School reinforce reading and assess comprehension and reading development with oral, written, and pictorial retellings of stories, shared Jeanne Blinco, the school's reading specialist.

Incentives are popular at the middle school level. Karen Best, a teacher at David Ruggles Junior High School 258 in Brooklyn, described the school's LIFT program—Literacy Improvement for Teens. Students earn savings bonds for reading books, writing reports, and good behavior. Ruggles also has a Battle of the Books, where classes compete to see which one can read the most books each month.

In another effort, the school designates one period a day for Sustained Silent Reading, when everyone, from the custodian to the principal, reads for pleasure. This idea originated at Ballard Hudson Middle School in Georgia and has spread to Paul Robeson High School in New York City.

At the Selma Middle School in Alabama, students select supplemental reading from a wide range of books. "By using literature to help teach social studies, I have generated a lot more student enthusiasm and changed the way I teach," said teacher Marsha Carmichael.

At Arizona's Ganado Intermediate School in the Navajo Nation, a host of efforts promote literacy.

Nancy Jennings, the school's reading specialist, described the At Home Reading Program, in which students received more than 1,000 books in incentive awards for reading 60,000 books, a four-fold increase in three years.

Susan Stropko, Ganado's principal, said the school offers writing workshops because it believes that teachers who write make better writing teachers.

The district also sponsors after-school, weekend, and summer courses and workshops in such areas as

Cindy Belin

Everything we do in our building is based on improving literacy.

—Joyce Picard, Teacher
Citizens' Memorial Elementary School
Woonsocket, Rhode Island

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reading, writing, English as a Second Language, multiple intelligences, Native American literature, and integrated thematic learning.

In other efforts, workshops show parents how to read at home to their children, students win awards for the number of books they read, high school students serve as peer tutors, teachers integrate reading strategies into all classes, and librarians read to every class every week. Says Stropko, "We build reading improvement into every one of our daily activities. And it's working!"

By using literature to help teach social studies, I have generated a lot more student enthusiasm and changed the way I teach.

—Marsha Carmichael, Teacher
Selma Middle School
Selma, Alabama

David Erdmann leads a workshop discussion.

The Power of Partnering with Colleges

In two workshops, *School-College Partnerships* and *Distance and Diversity in School-College Partnerships*, panelists discussed how partnerships can help both schools and colleges move toward excellence.

In the Rhode Island Excellent Schools Program, the state's eleven colleges and universities collaborated to create a guide of higher education resources available to all public schools. The guide lists college calendars of special events, teacher training and professional development opportunities, important phone numbers, and other information.

Throughout Rhode Island, school-college partnerships are flourishing, like the one between Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) and Central High School in Providence.

About two-thirds of Central's student body, which has large Hispanic, African-American, and Asian populations, come from "working poor" families. Many students do not have the academic background for four-year colleges and are intimidated as well by college costs and the application process, said Jeffrey Kenyon, head of guidance at the 2,000-student school.

Last spring, 50 seniors visited CCRI's campus for a day of orientation, presentations, and meetings with students.

"The day broke down barriers," said Kenyon.

Through the Rhode Island Excellent Schools Program, New England Institute of Technology (NEIT) is working with several Rhode Island schools. In one program, NEIT students prepared and delivered programs on computer use for elementary school teachers.

"Teachers were able to see the quality of our students, and we got to see what teachers were doing so that we could change some of our teaching strategies," said Stephanie Ferriola, NEIT's coordinator of campus-based faculty development. "We have been going into areas where we have never dared go before—and it's been a win-win combination."

As part of the FES New York City Excellent Schools Program, six colleges outside the City have committed half-a-million dollars of in-kind resources to six City public schools.

During the 1997–98 academic year, public school students are touring college campuses, developing relationships with college mentors, taking distance-learning classes, receiving technology assistance and curriculum development counseling, and welcoming college students as teachers. In October, the schools got an inside look at the college admissions process at a roundtable discussion with college admissions officers.

The FES Green Mountain Excellent Schools Program in Vermont pioneered *One More Step*, a mentoring program pairing college students from six Vermont colleges with 70 freshmen from seven high schools.

FES program director David Erdmann noted that FES has established 70 school-college partnerships. "They take on a life of their own. Everyone wins."

Jeffrey Kenyon, Terri Kless, Kyle Dodson, Stephanie Ferriola, and Dick Fucci

When you bring good people together in a common cause, great things happen. We should look at ourselves as change agents.

– James Thompson
Program Director
FES New York City
Excellent Schools Program

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An FES Priority: Transforming High-Risk into High-Promise

Many FES schools are developing programs to reach at-risk students—raise attendance, graduation, and college-going rates, and reduce disciplinary problems. At the panel discussion *Turning High-Risk into High-Promise*, several schools shared their insights and successful strategies.

Panelists agreed there is no such thing as a "typical" at-risk student. They don't all belong to gangs. They don't all abuse drugs. And they don't all live in the inner city.

In Macon, Georgia, two middle schools created the Success Program to better serve seventh graders who had been left back at least two years. Seventh graders at Appling and Ballard Hudson middle schools can skip eighth grade and go directly to ninth if they pass all six academic subjects.

The program combines small classes, community service, discussions of self-esteem and conflict resolution, and an accelerated curriculum. Students and parents must sign a contract that outlines the expectations of all parties.

All measures of student achievement—attendance, suspensions, promotions—showed improvement and students are transitioning successfully to high school.

"If we can keep kids in schools, we give them choices in their lives, options besides selling drugs," said teacher Tracie Dye of the Ballard Hudson Middle School. "The longer we can keep them in school, the longer we can buy time to try and make their lives better."

Winooski Middle/High School in Vermont recently created a Main Street Academy for 20 high-risk students. The Academy represents a "fundamental change" from the school's past attempts to reach high-risk students and initial anecdotal evidence is promising, said teacher Diane Chattman.

Ira Weston, principal of Paul Robeson High School in Brooklyn, New York, said his school created a multifaceted "all kids have promise" program. He told conference participants, "I don't believe in fix-it programs. Kids have already been in alienating systems. Our goal is to create an environment, a culture, a climate so all students will find success."

"We work hard to find success for ninth and tenth graders. If that happens, there is a good chance they will graduate," says Weston.

Being labeled high-risk can be a self-fulfilling prophecy for many students, panel moderator Kyle Dodson cautioned.

Diane Chattman, Tracie Dye, Ira Weston, and Kyle Dodson

Curricula starts at the front door with the custodian who says, 'Good morning' to students as they enter the building. Curricula isn't just what happens in the classroom. It is the total experience of the student while he is in school.

—Tracie Dye, Teacher
Ballard Hudson Middle School
Macon, Georgia

"Our educational system is not set up to tell high-risk kids that they are important. Other students are constantly rewarded directly and indirectly by school and society. High-risk students need to be told very directly that they matter," said Dodson, who directs the FES *One More Step* program.

Mentoring programs like *One More Step* provide role models for these students. Panelists agreed that students need role models, be they teachers, older students, community members, or parents.

Teachers can often be that figure. A single positive teacher can have an enormous impact on a student's life.

"I look for more than pedagogy when I hire teachers. I look for human feelings, loving, and caring," said Weston. "I can make teachers better through staff development. I can't make great teachers with a love of children. They're born."

Schools must provide what at-risk students are searching for. Weston commented that kids drop out and join gangs because gangs provide discipline, organization, and connections in their lives. Schools must provide these values and not tolerate any gang activity or symbols within the school. "Never negotiate with gang members and never put them on the same level as the school. Our job is to instill core values," said Weston.

Cecil R. Forster, Jr. and Rick Dalton

I don't believe in fix-it programs. Kids have already been in alienating systems. Our goal is to create an environment, a culture, a climate so all students will find success.

—Ira Weston, Principal
Paul Robeson High School
Brooklyn, New York

The team from Citizens' Memorial Elementary School of Woonsocket, Rhode Island.

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Raising Funds for School Improvement

Recommendations from Foundation Leaders

In a dialogue with conference participants, the directors of four foundations that support educational change shared their expertise. Frederick Bay, from the Josephine Bay Paul and C. Michael Paul Foundation and an FES board member; Joseph H. Cruickshank, from The Clark Foundation; Mario Peña from the Plan for Social Excellence, Inc., and an FES board member; and Marianne Larsen, from the International Paper Company Foundation, discussed how educators can raise funds for school improvement. Here are some key considerations.

- Kids, kids, kids. Show how the money will affect the lives of kids. Foundations are generally not interested in supporting bricks and mortar projects but programs that change the lives of students and teachers.

- Do your homework and know your audience. Learn what the foundation supports and tailor your proposal to their objectives. The *Foundation Book* is a one-stop guide to foundations and is available on the web.

- Establish credibility with the funder, if possible, before asking for help.

- Be direct and fresh in your proposal. Foundations are inundated with proposals and can see through a recycled proposal by a professional grant writer.

- Be succinct. While some funders require multi-page applications, many want a one-page description.

- Be professional. No mistakes. Period.

- Be persistent and don't be discouraged.

- Don't disappear once the grant money arrives. Keep communicating. Funders want to know that their money is being spent wisely. Reports should be more than fact sheets of cold numbers—they should convey the spirit of the program's success.

- Success begets success. Raising money is never easy, but the second and third time is often easier.

Shirley Cota

Funders are looking for organizations like FES, organizations with vision, commitment, and results that are changing the status quo and improving lives.

–Joseph H. Cruickshank
Executive Director
The Clark Foundation
New York, New York

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In the 1996 report *Dare to Dream: Educational Guidance for Excellence*, funded by the Lilly Endowment, FES was praised for its role in enhancing school leadership. As expected, the *Art of Leadership* workshop sparked a wide-ranging and spirited discussion among teachers, administrators, and parents. Here are some highlights.

Good leaders, panelists agreed, have a vision built on community input; are supportive, creative, respectful, patient, honest, and credible. They delegate; deliver on their promises; are good listeners; can articulate a common vision; and give people room to do their jobs and take risks.

"A leader is always in transformation. What is effective in one school may not be in another. What works when you're settling in, may not work three or four years later," said Noreen Hosier, principal, David Ruggles Junior High School 258, Brooklyn, New York.

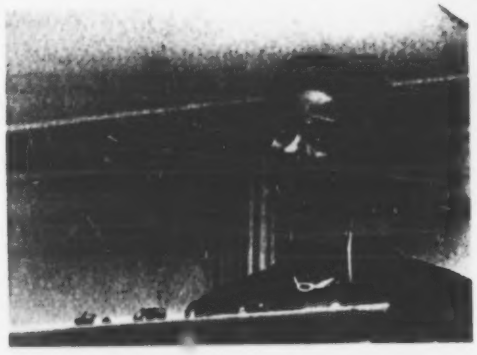
"Principals must understand how to nurture teachers who need help," said Leslie Improta, principal, Richmond Elementary School in Rhode Island.

"If you don't have a credible and trusting relationship with your teachers, nothing else matters," Improta stressed.

"The principal has to bring all stakeholders together and then articulate a shared vision," said Robert Jones, principal, Oxbow High School, Bradford, Vermont. "There may not always be total consensus, but effective leaders lay out the direction, the stations, and benchmarks along the way."

Jones reminded his colleagues that success builds on success, and it is critical that the principal help create a positive attitude. Every Oxbow faculty meeting, for example, starts with a "pride report" that helps create a supportive atmosphere for the meeting.

A school administration that consistently "does the right thing" will eventually pay off even when there appears to be little community support at the outset. Leadership is contagious and a critical first step in any effort is to develop community support.



Noreen Hosier

This conference was powerful and energizing. I appreciate all the sharing from teachers and administrators. I'm going back with a whole bagful of ideas.

—Maribeth A. Graham
School Board Member
West Carrollton City Schools
Dayton, Ohio

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Dean K. Whitla, director of the Counseling and Consulting Psychology Program at Harvard University, was the luncheon speaker. He praised FES participants for their efforts, and lauded the FES strategy of helping educators establish their own goals and devising strategies to achieve them. Whitla challenged FES educators to measure and to publish. Whitla is the former director of Harvard's Office of Instructional Research and Evaluation and the author of dozens of publications.

Dean K. Whitla

By deciding to measure something, you increase its importance. A good example is the Dow Jones average. The Dow isn't a good measure of the market, because it is based on only 30 to 50 stocks. But the very fact that we established that measure makes it important.

Because you make something important by deciding to measure it, you must choose very wisely the kind of things you measure. In the education business, we worry about, for example, using grades, because that oversimplifies a lot of information and it tends to make losers out of at-risk kids. It seems to me there are other kinds of measures we should look at, that grades need to be supplemented by other things.

One of the reasons why FES programs are successful is because they've undertaken to measure these other things—such as attendance and parental involvement, dropout rates, percentages of students going on to postsecondary education. These kinds of measures are very important.

FES programs work because educators have chosen their own goals, established the strategies to reach those goals, and measured the outcomes. This is a wonderful formula for making change because you've made it your own.

Assessment is important because it gives you immediate feedback. Educators need some sense of reality, to learn "How well am I doing?"

I would also challenge each of you to publish an article during the next 12 months. We build on other people's experiences. Publication is helpful in the assessment process, because it forces you to think about research and measures, to do statistics, to formalize your results in ways to make them accessible to other people. You learn a lot through the process of writing it out.

So many good things happening in schools don't get written up and shared. We have to reinvent the wheel all the time. There are too many good ideas that are lost.

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—Dean K. Whitla, Director
Counseling and Consulting
Psychology Program
Harvard University

At the workshop *School-to-Work Programs*, educators discussed the strategies they've developed through their involvement in FES.

Joseph Crowley, director of Rhode Island's Chariho Career and Technical Center, noted that high schools too often made "work" a four-letter word and used college acceptance rates as the indicator of their success. School-to-work and school-to-career programs are needed not just for vocational students but college-bound students as well, especially because 70 percent of the jobs in the 21st century will require technical skills.

Winooski Middle/High School in Vermont, for example, recently introduced a program that enables every senior to shadow an employer.

At Paul Robeson High School in Brooklyn, New York, classroom learning is reinforced by paid summer internships in the New York business and financial community.

In a separate program, Robeson partners with Salomon Brothers Inc. Components include mentoring, college advising and scholarship programs, a summer internship program, and a technology sharing arrangement.

The opportunity offered to students involved in the partnership between Robeson and Salomon Brothers is a model that needs to be replicated throughout the nation. Students involved in this program have been inspired to pursue careers in finance, and a number of these students have returned to Salomon Brothers after completing college.

"We need to change the culture of education and rethink the old paradigm that you need four years of college to get a job," said Gary Turits, director of occupational education at Otsego Northern Catskills BOCES. Through their involvement with FES, educators have developed a stronger focus on the school-to-work issue, and specific ways to change underlying attitudes were eagerly exchanged.

Participating Member

Foundation for Excellent

James Cournoyer, Cynthia Foulkes, and Christine Watler

We need to change the culture of education and rethink the old paradigm that you need four years of college to get a job.

—Gary Turits
Director of Occupational Education
Otsego Northern Catskills BOCES
Otsego, New York

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Tools for the Future

Excerpts from the keynote address by Albert R. Dowden, President and CEO, Volvo Group North America, Inc.

As an employer, I am one of the judges, rightly or wrongly, fairly or unfairly, of your success. I represent those who desperately need and who accept or reject your work, not what you do or how you do it, but what you actually produce.

When you fail, your failure shifts the educational onus to us. We are not always able to assume it successfully, although we are getting better by necessity.

The fact of the matter is thus: today's educational problems are tomorrow's social and economic problems. And what does it say about much of our school system when remediation becomes the rule and not the exception?

We as outsiders can never really appreciate what you do and the daunting challenges you face, but even from my rather distant vantage point I can see several challenges.

First, there is the time element. We live in a world where increasingly the problem with instant gratification is that it isn't fast enough. For teachers it can take years and generations to see the real results of hard work.

Second, there are the inevitable frustrations, which give rise to the temptation to establish short-term and only marginally relevant goals. The sort of goals on which bureaucracy thrives but which, while they give comfort, don't really bring about real progress. It is the long term that counts.

Third, there is resistance from embedded bureaucracy, from those who would prefer to teach one year 30 times rather than 30 years, those who have become their own constituency.

Finally, you have to break down barriers and share with each other, both "at home" and at gatherings like this.

What is going to be important long term is not whether a student passed a course but what tools that course or that experience put in his or her toolbox.

Increasingly we do need a facility with technology–particularly computer technology– I don't need to preach. We also need to remember why we are using technology and not just how we are using it.

If you think TV stunted genuine personal growth, wait until you see what the Internet can do. The ability to push buttons and tap keys does not equate with the ability to think. It is a necessary tool and properly used can open the door to all the world's tools, but all of that is at best nonproductive and at worse counterproductive if your students cannot think.

We need both computer rooms and a poet in residence. We need people who understand people as well as machines and that means the study of philosophy, religion, language, literature, geography.

As a former student and as a current parent and employer, I ask you to find ways to make learning fun and relevant. The broader the better. With subjects which increase one's ability to understand, reason, and communicate.

Albert R. Dowden, James Thompson, and Cecil R. Forster, Jr.

As an employer, I am one of the judges . . . I represent those who desperately need and who accept or reject your work, . . .

–Albert R. Dowden
President and CEO
Volvo Group North America, Inc

Mission and History

FES is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of American public education (K–12) through programs designed to increase opportunities and improve academic performance of all students by bringing together educators, students, parents, and the local business community.
FES roots go back to the National College Counseling Project, a 1983 research study. Directed by Rick Dalton, then director of enrollment planning at Middlebury College, and David Erdmann, then director of admissions at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the project identified school programs and practices that improved academic performance and increased student opportunities.

In 1987, the two educators applied some of these best practices in working with two Florida high schools. In 1991, FES was founded to work with and share best practices with schools around the country.
Since 1987, FES and its predecessors have worked with 110 schools and have been supported by grants from over 45 foundations, corporations, and individuals.

Process

FES works with the school community to create low-budget, grassroots, self-sustaining programs. The process begins with a two-day planning and training workshop that identifies a school's needs, and develops a two-year strategic plan to meet them, and suggests additional resources, such as college and business partnerships. In addition to monthly reports submitted by the school, an FES program director—often an educator from a school that has participated in an FES program—meets regularly with school staff. Throughout the school year, there are several planning workshops and an annual year-end evaluation workshop.

Web Site (www.fesnet.org)

The web site contains a list of best practices, background information on the foundation and its programs, recent press releases, and the current issue of *FES News*, the quarterly newsletter.

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